The Raven by Edgar Allan Poe

BEFORE YOU READ

REVIEW SKILLS

Reinforce your mastery of this literary concept as you read "The Raven":

SYMBOLISM
The use of a person, a place, a thing, or an event to stand both for itself and for something beyond itself.

Reading Standard 3.3 Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, the author's style, and the "sound" of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes or both.

Reading Standard 3.4 Analyze the ways in which poets use imagery, personification, figures of speech, and sounds to evoke readers' emotions.

Reading Standard 3.7 (Grade 9–10 Review) Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, and symbolism.

LITERARY FOCUS: SOUND EFFECTS

Edgar Allan Poe was a master at creating sound effects in his stories and poems. Here is a list of some of Poe's favorite sound devices:

Sound Device	Example from "The Raven"
Refrain: Repeated lines.	"Nevermore."
End rhyme: Rhymes at the ends of lines.	"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber **door**—/ Only this and nothing **more.**"
Internal rhyme: Rhyme that occurs within lines.	While I nodded, nearly **napping,** suddenly there came a **tapping**
Alliteration: Repetition of a consonant sound.	While I **n**odded, **n**early **n**apping, suddenly there came a tapping
Onomatopoeia: Use of words with sounds that echo their sense.	While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a **tapping**
Meter: Regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poem.	′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ Once upon a midnight dreary, ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ while I pondered, weak and weary,

READING SKILLS: ORAL READING

To enjoy Poe, and to be sure you have caught the meaning of each line of this famous poem, read the poem aloud. Feel the beat of the lines and listen for the rhyming sounds, the repeated consonant sounds, and the use of onomatopoeia. After you have read the poem aloud at least once, you will find that your comprehension of the text has improved.

Use the Skill After one oral reading of the poem, stop to mark up its sound devices. You could circle or underline or box examples of alliteration, rhyme, and onomatopoeia. Then, read the poem aloud again, this time to a classmate. Give special emphasis to those sound devices you marked.

The Raven

Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and
weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door—
5 " 'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the
floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
10 From my books surcease[1] of sorrow—sorrow for the lost
Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
15 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
" 'Tis some visitor entreating[2] entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
This it is and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
20 "Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;[3]
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,

1. **surcease** *n.:* end.
2. **entreating** *v.:* begging; asking.
3. **implore** *v.:* plead; ask.

ANALYZE

Circle the rhyming words in lines 1–6. What kind of **mood,** or atmosphere, do the rhymes create?

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 9–10. What is the speaker trying to do?

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage silently at first, and mark up the sound devices it contains (alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, and so on). Then, read the passage aloud, and focus on conveying simple meaning. Read the passage aloud a second time, and bring the sound effects to life.

And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened wide the door;—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;[4]
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;[5]
Not the least obeisance[6] made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien[7] of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—

IDENTIFY

What happens in lines 25–30? Mark up the sound devices you find while you re-read.

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 31–36. What does the narrator say might be causing the tapping? Do you think he really believes his own explanation?

IDENTIFY

Who enters the speaker's chamber (lines 37–42)?

4. **lattice** *n.:* shutter or screen formed by strips or bars overlaid in a criss-cross pattern.
5. **Raven . . . of yore:** *Of yore* is an obsolete way of saying "of time long past." Poe's allusion is to 1 Kings 17:1–6, which tells of the prophet Elijah being fed by ravens in the wilderness.
6. **obeisance** (ō · bāʹsəns) *n.:* gesture of respect.
7. **mien** (mēn) *n.:* manner.

Perched upon a bust of Pallas[8] just above my chamber door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling[9] my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
45 "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"[10]
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

Much I marveled this ungainly[11] fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
50 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

55 But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—
Till I scarcely more than muttered "Other friends have flown before—
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before."
60 Then the bird said "Nevermore."

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster

8. **Pallas:** Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom.
9. **beguiling** *v.* used as *adj.:* deceiving.
10. **Plutonian shore:** Pluto is the Greek god of the underworld—the land of darkness—called Hades (hā′dēz′). Hades is separated from the world of the living by several rivers; hence, the mention of a shore.
11. **ungainly** *adj.:* unattractive.

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 43–48. Underline the question the speaker asks the raven. Circle the raven's reply.

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 55–60. What does the speaker compare the raven's probable departure to?

CLARIFY

How does the speaker explain the bird's ability to say the word *nevermore* (lines 61–63)?

Notes

Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
65 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of 'Never—nevermore.' "

But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
70 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
75 This and more I sat divining,[12] with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o'er,
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamplight gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

READ & REREAD

Read lines 67–72 once for basic meaning. Then, read them again, and underline examples of alliteration, circle rhymes, and box onomatopoeic words.

12. divining *v.* used as *adj.:* guessing; supposing.

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
80 Swung by seraphim[13] whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite—respite and nepenthe[14] from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff,[15] oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

85 "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted,[16] on this desert land enchanted—
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?[17]—tell me—tell me, I implore!"
90 Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,[18]
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
95 Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

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13. seraphim *n. pl.:* highest of the nine ranks of angels.
14. nepenthe (nē • pen′thē) *n.:* sleeping potion that people once believed would relieve pain and sorrow.
15. quaff *v.:* drink heartily.
16. undaunted *adj.:* unafraid.
17. Is . . . Gilead: literally, "Is there any relief from my sorrow?" Poe paraphrases a line from Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Gilead was a region in ancient Palestine known for its healing herbs, such as balm, a healing ointment.
18. Aidenn: Arabic for "Eden; Heaven."

CLARIFY

Pause at line 84. Who does the speaker say sent the raven? Why, according to the speaker, was he sent?

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice, taking careful note of how it is punctuated and what sounds are repeated. How would you describe the speaker's state of mind here?

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 91–96. Circle the question that the narrator asks the raven in this stanza. Then, underline the raven's answer. In your own words, restate the question and answer.

Notes

ANALYZE

Re-read lines 103–108. Underline the words that describe the raven. What do you think the bird **symbolizes**? ***(Grade 9–10 Review)***

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid[19] bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

19. pallid *adj.:* pale.

The Raven

Literary Focus: Sound Effects Look back over the sound effects you marked up in the poem. Find an example of each of the following types of sound effects, and enter it in the chart below.

Sound Effect	Example from "The Raven"
Repetition	
Rhyme (internal or end)	
Alliteration	
Onomatopoeia	

Evaluate Review the details you recorded in the chart above. What do the sound effects contribute to the poem?

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Check your Standards Mastery at the back of this book.